

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 7

### “La Belle Époque”

#### Transcript

*(Provided by listener Joseph M.)*

[music: Fanfare]

In 1806, Napoleon and his army marched through Berlin. The insult rankled the proud Prussians for 65 years. In 1871, following France’s catastrophic defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, one of the treaty terms was that the Prussian army got a chance to march through Paris, thus avenging the insult. The French had no choice but to agree, but on the day of the parade the streets were empty, the buildings draped in black, the city eerily silent. Basically, the French took all the fun out of it.

The treaty of Frankfurt also ceded portions of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany, but the French were determined to take all the fun out of that, too. They never accepted the loss, and French foreign and military policy for the next 47 years will be focused on the restoration of the lost provinces. Two generations of French school children will be taught that Alsace and Lorraine are rightfully French. So intense will the French obsession with these two provinces become that the very French word for revenge, *revanche*, will become in the English language *revanchism*, today a generic term for a policy aimed at the recovery of lost territory. And the rivalry between France and Germany will establish the two opposing poles to which the other European powers will be drawn, like bits of iron to one end or the other of a magnet.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 7: *La Belle Époque*.

*La Belle Époque* is a French expression meaning the beautiful era. And it is often used to describe the turn of the century in general, and the turn of the twentieth century in France in particular. We’re going to be talking about the latter today. You may have already noticed that in telling the history of the twentieth century I like to stay in timeline. I don’t like to reference events that take place in the future, relative to the time we’re talking about. Because hindsight is 20/20, and one of the things I hope to accomplish in this podcast is to help you see the world of

the twentieth century through the eyes of the people who were living through it at the time. But it won't always be possible to stick to the timeline, and right now is a time where I will have to break my own rule.

No one who lived during “The Beautiful Era” called it “The Beautiful Era.” It was only after the horror of the Great War, and the painful economic downturn that followed that people began to look back on this time as a golden age. Now there's something to be said about it as a golden age, and Paris more so than any place else. The arts were thriving, not just painting and sculpture and music, and dance and literature and song, but fashion and cuisine, food and drink, architecture and engineering. But as Barbara Tuchman points out in her book, *The Proud Tower*, a collection of essays about this era—a book I recommend very highly by the way—the turn of the century looks better in hindsight than it did at the time. It was also a time of much cruelty and harshness, of injustice and inequality, of grinding poverty and callous indifference. How can we call it a golden age when we know what comes next? When we know that it ends in a horrific war? Wars are not an accident of nature, like a meteor falling from the skies to obliterate the dinosaurs. Wars are made by human beings, who go into them with their eyes open. The nightmare of the Great War did not come out of nowhere, it was a consequence of the rot of this age.

I suppose you could do a whole podcast on *La Belle Époque*, I'm going to settle for an introduction to France in the final decades of the 19th century as a way of orienting you to the situation in Europe in general, and France in particular. France is in no way unique either in its beauty or in its rot compared to the other great powers at the time. But perhaps the contrast between the two is starker here than it is in many other places.

And as long as I've already broken the timeline, let me add one more thought about international tensions in this age. I learned this history during the Cold War, I don't know if they teach it any better nowadays, but back then it was easy for all of us to look at the run up to the Great War in Cold War terms, by which I mean two great power blocs staring uneasily at one another over the course of decades, building up their militaries in anticipation of a war that no one wants but many fear will happen. I'm referring of course to the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente.

But I think that's a false reading of the history, there were no two fully formed power blocs glaring at each other eyeball-to-eyeball over a period of decades, there were alliances, but they were fluid. Nations moved in and out of them over the period of 1870-1914. There were only two constants in European relations over this time. One was the alliance between Germany and Austria, which was based on a common linguistic and cultural heritage, at least between the Germans and the Austrian ruling class, if not the majority of Austria-Hungary's citizens. There was also the commonality of their imperial constitutional systems. Not quite a parliamentary democracy as we understand that, but not quite full on autocracy either. If there's an analogy to

the Cold War it's here, and the alignment of two countries with similar ideologies and systems of government.

The other constant was the confrontation between Germany and France. France never got over the loss of Alsace and Lorraine. Her feelings of resentment and her will to revenge against Germany will be the guiding principle of French foreign policy for 50 years. So if you could go back in time to say, 1890, and talk to educated Europeans of that day, and tell them that a war is coming in 25 years and ask them to predict who will be fighting whom, France against Germany would likely be a common guess. If you told them it was going to be a general war involving all the major powers they would probably guess that France would be on one side, and Germany and Austria on the other side, although where the other major powers would come down would be a question you might not see a consensus on. Recall that the last general war in Europe occurred in the Napoleonic era, and was basically France against everyone else. So our hypothetical conversation partner in 1890 might well conclude from the clues you gave in your questions that you were hinting at something like a replay of the Napoleonic Wars. Because Germany has been working overtime since the end of the Franco-Prussian war to keep France diplomatically isolated and too weak to exercise her will to revenge.

For a time Russia, Germany, and Austria were allied together under an agreement known as the Three Emperors League, which makes sense again from an ideological point of view. Three imperial autocratic powers would naturally ally, wouldn't they? And wouldn't France, the only Republic among the Great Powers naturally be the odd man out?

The Third Republic began during the Franco-Prussian War, following the disaster at Sedan, where over 100,000 French soldiers, including the emperor, Napoleon III, surrendered to the Prussians, more or less guaranteeing that France would lose the war. The capture of the unpopular and now despised emperor led to revolution in Paris, and a new republic was born. It all happened very fast, there was no time to write a constitution or make big decisions about what kind of government this was going to be. The Prussians laid siege to Paris, and after 5 months, France capitulated. The humiliating treaty was signed, followed almost at once by a socialist uprising in Paris, the Paris Commune, which was put down after bloody fighting with the regular French army under the command of the new national government.

Elections for a National Assembly were held immediately after the Armistice with the Prussians, and the election actually returned a majority in favor of reestablishing a constitutional monarchy to replace Napoleon III's empire. But the leading candidate for king, sometimes referred to as Henry V, wasn't interested in being a constitutional monarch, he was looking for a more absolutist kind of monarchy. And in particular, he insisted that the French ditch the tricolor flag of the Revolution as too republican. But this had been the French flag for something like 65 years now, aside from the period 1815-1830. This was the flag under which France had bested

the finest armies in Europe and in the wake of the humiliation at the hands of the Prussians, France was in no mood to give up this one last symbol of past glory. So believe it or not, part of the reason the Third Republic is a republic and not a restoration of a constitutional monarchy is that the French were so attached to that flag.

The urge to restore the monarchy would fade away over time and gradually republicanism would take shape. In fact the history of the Third Republic from 1870 to 1914 is a history of a state becoming increasingly stable as a republic and the gradual dying off of the last of the monarchists. Eventually, “La Marseillaise,” the old revolutionary anthem that had actually been banned in France for a while, and was taken up as an anthem by the Paris Commune was restored to its rightful place as the French National anthem in 1879, as sure a sign as any that the republic is here to stay.

[music: “La Marseillaise”]

*To arms, citizens,  
Form your battalions,  
March on! March on!  
Let the enemy's blood  
Water our fields!*

Man that's harsh. But as the new French monarchy, oops, strike out monarchy, replace it with republic, takes its shape France will be subjected to intense political infighting. There are those who never give up on the monarchy, and there are radical republicans with socialist inclinations, and in the middle there are the so-called opportunists. Republicans who are content to reintroduce republican reforms slowly and gradually. If you've been listening to Mike Duncan's History of the French Revolution, all of this should sound very, very familiar.

The Catholic Church plays an important role in French society, and played an important role in these political disputes. From the point of view of republicans, Catholics are suspiciously conservative and monarchist. Devout Catholics were a key constituency of Napoleon III, hence his mucking around in the Papal States, a story we'll get to when we do Italy. The Catholic Church controls much of the education system of France during this time, which alarms republicans, who are suspicious that the next generation of French are being indoctrinated against the Republic. The Church even operated a school in France that was specifically intended to prepare boys to enter the French military academy at Saint-Cyr. They French equivalent of the US military academy at West Point. It looked suspiciously like a long term project to fill the French officer corps with Catholic moles.

For their part, Catholics viewed the Republic with suspicion. Bitter memories of the French Revolution remain, as did the fact that the old republic had seized a fortune in church property for its own benefit. To the staunchest Catholics, republicanism looked an awful lot like an excuse to pillage the Church. The fact that the staunchest republicans tended to be Protestants, or atheists, or Jews, only tended to underscore their worst suspicions.

France had been a Catholic country for as long as there's been a France. As far as many Catholics were concerned, to be French is to be Catholic. This may seem like a pleasant sentiment on the surface, but as any logician can tell you it comes with the inevitable corollary, to not be Catholic is to not be French. And when you look at it that way, is it any wonder that so many Protestants, and Atheists, and Jews support the secular aims of the republicans?

It was about at this time that Catholic conservatives in France organized the Union Générale Bank. The principle of the Union Générale Bank was to give a place for Catholic French to deposit their money where their funds would be managed and lent in the furtherance of Catholic values. As opposed to "other" banks where Catholics deposit their money, only for those funds to be invested by people whose values are antithetical to Catholic values, if you know who I mean and I think you do. The project was duly organized, and many conservative Catholic families of modest means, not to mention many priests, invested their money in the bank, and lost it when the bank collapsed in 1882.

So what lesson do we learn from the collapse of the Union Générale Bank? One lesson we might draw is that the founder of the bank was better at conning money out of right-leaning French Catholics with a cock-and-bull story about how all the other banks are run by Jews than he was at, you know, prudently investing money once he got his hands on it. But if you happen to be the founder of the bank, what you say is the bank was brought down by an international conspiracy of Germans and Jewish financiers intent on destroying any project intended to advance the wellbeing of wholesome French Catholics.

Which brings us to Édouard Drumont. In 1886 Drumont published a book, *Jewish France*, in which he laid out the case the French Jews were dangerous enemies of the nation. *Jewish France* had it all: the Jews killed our savior, the Jews control all the money, the Jews brought down Union Générale, the Jews are a degenerate race while the French are noble Aryans. Basically *Jewish France* is a blueprint for all anti-Semitic propaganda for the next hundred years. The book was a bestseller, and was much discussed in France. Which was odd when you consider there weren't really that many Jews in France. We're talking something less than a quarter of a percent of the population of the country. I mean really, you start to wonder where this obsession comes from.

Drumont would go on to found a Paris newspaper, *La Libre Parole*, which means “the Free Word”, I’m going to call it *The Free Word* from now on because... that’s easier to say. There were dozens of daily newspapers being published in Paris at this time, covering the full spectrum of political opinion and eagerly and raucously slanting all the news their way. You think there was yellow journalism in New York at this time, New York has nothing on Paris.

France was an aggressive colonial power in the 19th century. As you may know it had important colonial holdings in North America and India back in the 18th century, but after a series of wars with Britain beginning with the French and Indian War, the war people outside the United States call the Seven Years War, and continuing through Waterloo, and then adding in the revolt in Haiti, hardly anything was left. By 1830 the French colonial empire was down to a handful of islands and outposts, Senegal, and French Guiana in South America. But 1830 marks the year that French imperialism begins to make a comeback. The French take possession of the nominally Ottoman, there’s that word again, province of Algeria, just opposite France across the Mediterranean, which the French declare to be now a department of France.

During the reign of Napoleon III, France established control over the island of New Caledonia, assisted the British in the second Opium War, and won concessions in China, seized control of southern Vietnam in retaliation after the Vietnamese Emperor Tự Đức tried to crack down on French missionary activity in Vietnam. And then shortly after that, King Norodom of Cambodia, which was at that time a vassal state of Thailand, revolted against the Thai King Mongkut and asked for French protection, and so Cambodia became a French protectorate. King Mongkut by the way is the King of *Anna and the King of Siam*, or *The King and I*. Napoleon III also famously intervened in Mexico in a misguided attempt to turn Mexico into some kind of colony or protectorate, or Hapsburg-ruled empire or whatever, because of course he did. But as you know that did not end well.

But after France became a republic in 1871 French imperial expansion ended, because republican governments don’t go around the world conquering other peoples, imposing their rule where it isn’t wanted, and building colonial empires the way brutal autocracies like Germany, Austria or Russia do. I’m kidding of course, because that’s exactly what they did. France basically went from zero to second biggest colonial power in the world during the 19th century. Sending explorers east from Senegal and up the Congo River, subduing what was left of Vietnam, and making Madagascar first into a protectorate, and then a possession. The French also expanded eastward from Algeria, taking control of the nominally Ottoman province of Tunisia, a move which deeply angered the fledgling kingdom of Italy, which saw Tunisia as rightfully theirs. And anger over French meddling in Tunisia is a major reason why Italy would soon choose to ally with Germany and Austria in the Triple Alliance.

The French government argued that colonial holdings were necessary to provide coaling stations for the French Navy, as well as markets for French exports. It's important to keep in mind that in the 19th century, import tariffs were a major source of income for most governments. Colonial possessions amounted to a free trade zone, territories that would buy your exports and sell you their raw materials, tax free. But not all republicans agreed with this. And I suppose this would be a good time to introduce one of the Chamber of Deputies' most trenchant opponents of colonialism, George Clemenceau.

George Clemenceau was born in 1841 in the Vendée. His mother was a Huguenot, his father a physician, an atheist, and a fiercely devoted revolutionary. And this is a case where the acorn didn't fall very far from the tree. Young Clemenceau went to Paris to study medicine, he also became a writer and got involved with politics. This was during the Second Empire, and Clemenceau was an opponent of Napoleon III. Consequently he went to prison for organizing demonstrations against the government and fled to the United States in 1865 to avoid arrest. In the US he taught French, and in 1869, married one of his students, Mary Plummer. They would have three children together, but the marriage would end acrimoniously and very publicly. Clemenceau was an ardent republican with socialist leanings, who would take his seat in the Chamber of Deputies in 1876, where he would be a fierce critic of the French government, particularly in colonial policy. Clemenceau objected to colonialism on moral grounds, and also on the grounds that it distracted French attention and resources and attention away from the *real* issue, you know the one that I mean, Alsace and Lorraine.

In the year 1889, Clemenceau would still be playing his role in the Chamber of Deputies. 1889 would mark the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution, and Paris was gearing up for a grand exposition to celebrate the centenary. But the year got off on the wrong foot when first the popular military man, General Boulanger, sometimes known as General *Revanche* for his strident talk about the return of you-know-what and you-know-what-else, came within a whisker of overthrowing the republic. Boulanger had become a lightning rod for conservative discontent, restoration of the monarchy, and opposition to the corruption of the republic. But his power grab fizzled out and he was forced to flee the country. And while all of this was going on, the Panama Canal Company was declared bankrupt, although it would take years to unwind the mess and find out how bad it really was.

But maybe I'm dwelling too much on the dark side of the Third Republic. Let's talk about some of the good stuff.

The 1889 Expo went off according to plan and the high point of the whole thing, literally, was the Eiffel Tower, constructed for the expo. Gustave Eiffel was a French engineer and architect whose company did groundbreaking work in iron girder construction. Eiffel's company built the

supporting structure for the Statue of Liberty, France's gift to the United States on the occasion of its own centennial.

When planning began for the 1889 exposition the centerpiece was to be a structure on the Champ de Mars. Eiffel and his company proposed a huge iron tower, rising from four bases and curving together into a single tower. The structure was to be 300 meters tall, making it twice as tall as what was then the tallest structure in the world, the Washington Monument. And whereas construction of the Washington monument took 37 years, the Eiffel Tower would be built in two.

There was some controversy in this plan. A group of 300 artists, one for each meter of height of the proposed tower, petitioned the government to oppose the project for aesthetic reasons. Paris was a city of elegant stone buildings, and for all of these to be dwarfed by an industrial iron frame like a gigantic black smokestack sounded to them like a nightmare. Eiffel responded patiently to the criticism. A great deal of planning and calculation had gone into the tower; it was perhaps the most carefully engineered project of the age. Engineering was an art form too (yeah, preach it brother Gustave) and to come to a deep understanding of the laws of nature, and apply them elegantly to build a structure that surpasses anything previously built in the history of humanity was also a kind of artistic expression. Engineers have a sense of aesthetics too, he argued. And pointed out delicately that even great artists were not infallible in their aesthetic judgments.

Eiffel prevailed, and he got to build his tower. The plan was that the tower would stand for twenty years, and then be taken down. Eiffel paid half the cost of constructing the tower out of his own pocket, sinking his entire personal fortune into the project. Most everyone in Paris assumed he would go broke. The tower of course proved to be immensely popular, and Eiffel made his fortune back, and much, much more on the admission fees. By the time the twenty years were up, the thought of Paris without the tower was unthinkable. And the tower remains Paris's signature landmark to this day.

I suppose I should say a word about those famous Parisian artists. I talked about Romanticism some back in episode 2, and France had its Romantic era. The trouble with a podcast is that I can't show you paintings while I'm talking about them, but I have put up a few on the website for you to take a look at [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com). The first one is the epitome of French Romanticism. Eugene Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*. It's got violence, drama, stormy weather, the French flag, bare breasts, extremes of light and darkness, dead bodies, basically everything you could ask for in a Romantic painting. Now compare that to the next painting. Claude Monet's *Impression, Sunrise*. Here we have something entirely different. Painting with broad brush strokes, with no clear subject, with a hazy, almost dreamlike quality. And instead of depicting a moment of drama and passion, this painting gives us a relaxed quotidian atmosphere.



The title of this painting, *Impression, Sunrise* provided a name for this new style of art, impressionism.

Impressionism is one of those words that was originally coined in derision, like “Quaker” or “Puritan” or “Methodist”. Many impressionist artists rejected the term in their own lifetimes. Although today it’s considered the accepted name for this style and period of art. I’ve posted a few other impressionist paintings on the website, from some of the other painters of the age. Manet, Degas, Renoir. Check them out, you’ll probably recognize most of them. Notice the coarse brush strokes, the dreamy atmosphere, and the everyday, pointedly undramatic subjects.

As for music, there isn’t much to say about French Romantic music. Romanticism in music was almost entirely a German phenomenon. And I described it in episode 2. But fortunately we have Hector Berlioz to give us at least a bit of a flavor of French Romanticism.

[music: *Symphonie fantastique*, Hector Berlioz]

But Romanticism gave way to impressionism in music as well. And the guy who did it was Claude Debussy. He was a musical prodigy with a personal life that would make a great melodrama. He had his own unique musical style, and it’s hard to resist calling it impressionism, even though Debussy himself said that was the word imbeciles used to describe his music. Debussy’s *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Fawn* premiered in December, 1894, the same month that the Dreyfus Affair broke. It was a starkly original piece in the distinct Debussy style with his radical use of harmony. I played an excerpt from it back in Episode 1, and I should probably play it here as well, but I can’t resist playing *La Mer*, the Sea, which premiered in 1905. For me this is the essence of musical impressionism. This is the sea in music, the way Monet would have painted it. And if that makes me an imbecile, so be it.

[music: *La Mer*, Claude Debussy]

And then there was Maurice Ravel, who was just a little bit younger than Debussy, his sometime friend, sometime rival. His own style was a bit more structured and conventional, he’s usually regarded as the other great impressionist composer, although Ravel himself said that while Debussy was clearly an impressionist, he himself certainly was not. Whatever.

[music: *Miroirs*, Maurice Ravel]

The role of women in the Third Republic was a controversial topic. The traditional Catholic, monarchist part of French society emphasized the role of women in the home, as wife and mother. Socialists and communists advocated for women’s equality, and there were some piecemeal reforms of the Napoleonic Code in the late 19th century, such as civil divorce,

establishing the rights of women to inherit, to serve on juries, and to enter professions previously restricted to men.

But women's rights were controversial, owing to a peculiar demographic fact about France during this period. France has traditionally been the most populous nation in Europe, but that is no longer the case, and this has become a national security issue, once the population of Germany overtakes the population of France. Between 1870 and 1910 the population of Germany increased by 60% while the population of France increased by less than 10%. This was in spite of the fact that Germany saw much more emigration during this period than France did. The exact reason for this demographic peculiarity is still not well understood to this day, but French traditionalists of the age placed the blame squarely on the Republic and its turning away from traditional Catholic values.

Department stores were coming into their own in the late 19th century. This was by no means a French phenomenon, department stores were very much a thing in major cities in the United States, such as Macy's in New York, Marshall Field's in Chicago, John Wanamaker's in Philadelphia and Hudson's in Detroit. Paris had its own flagship department store, Au Bon Marché.

Shopping in the early 19th century involved walking down a dirty lit street, in and out of dozens of dimly lit shops. Dimly lit because everything was dimly lit in the early 19th century. To buy one kind of thing here and another kind of thing there. You were likely dealing with the owner of the shop, who would be a man, and his customer service motto would likely be "all sales final." The department store changed everything.

It's probably no coincidence that department stores were largely founded by retailers who had previously sold goods mostly to women. Things like lace and fabric and notions. Department stores were huge buildings where you could buy anything to furnish and decorate your home or yourself. They were spacious, welcoming places, brightly lit, thanks to electric light, where the people who waited on you were as likely to be women as men. And where there were such amenities as a play space where you could leave your children, a reading room, where you could leave your husband, a tea room where you could take lunch with your friends. Basically, you could spend the whole day there, which was totally the point. The store's exchange and return policy was generous, so if that blue dress turned out not quite to match your hat the way you expected it to, it was no problem. It was department stores that popularized the motto "the customer is always right."

It was the department store that turned shopping from a chore into a recreation. I feel a little strange saying that the rise of shopping is an important milestone on the road to women's equality. But you know, it's true. Department stores empowered women to shop, and to take this

disliked chore off the hands of their men, which gave women more economic clout. Department store tea rooms gave women a place where it was socially acceptable to gather with other women in an environment where there were no men around, and gave them freedom to compare notes on their lives and their relationships with their men.

And department stores offered women something that was in short supply in the 19th century, a respectable job opportunity. France's premier novelist of this age, Emile Zola, wrote a series of novels intended to document the different facets of 19<sup>th</sup> century life. One of his novels was set entirely in a department store, modeled on Au Bon Marché. Because Zola also saw the significance of the department store. He titled it *The Ladies Paradise*. By the way, Zola also wrote a novel that was a fictionalized version of the controversy surrounding Manet's painting *Luncheon on the Grass*, one of the paintings you can see on the website.

The example of the department store tea room was not lost on the restaurant business. Consider César Ritz, born to a poor family in Switzerland, who managed to work his way up from waiter, a job he was fired from a couple of times, to restaurant manager, to hotelier. By the early twentieth century he would be managing hotels across Europe, some bearing his name, which would become synonymous with the highest levels of luxury and service. Ritz teamed up with Auguste Escoffier, the greatest chef of the age. In Ritz's hotels, Escoffier reinvented the restaurant. Restaurants had previously been small, dimly lit, divey kinds of places that mostly catered to men. Ritz and Escoffier introduced electric lighting to brighten the place up, and not incidentally make it obvious how sparkling clean their restaurant was. Whereas eating out was previously the domain of men, Ritz and Escoffier created restaurants where it would be appropriate for women to gather. It would be elegantly decorated, the dishes offered would be lighter, with smaller portions, and a menu that offered you the opportunity to order à la carte, so you could construct your own meal to your own tastes. And so did Escoffier create modern French cuisine, and restaurants as we know them today.

It's probably not a coincidence that champagne came into its own during this era. It was partly a technological innovation. Sparkling wine was previously regarded as incredibly difficult to handle. Champagne requires thicker bottles, a special kind of cork, a special kind of mechanism to insert those corks into the bottle, and a wire retaining gizmo to make sure the cork stays put until you want to open the bottle. All of these are 19th century technological innovations. And in no time at all, champagne becomes established as, dare I say it, the ritziest of wines.

This brings us to the fateful years of 1893 and 1894. By 1893 the full magnitude of the Panama Canal bankruptcy had become apparent after years of government effort to cover it up. 800,000 French people, many of them of ordinary means, had invested in the Panama Canal project. Now their money, close to two billion francs, was gone. And it wasn't just that the canal project failed. The finance guys diverted quite a bit of money, as finance guys are wont to do, and some of it

ended up in the pockets of politicians. Conservatives saw this as proof that republican government was corrupt. Over a hundred deputies were accused of taking bribes from the company, including George Clemenceau.

Edouard Drumont's anti-Semitic newspaper *The Free Word* trumpeted the scandal and blamed it all on the Jews and their friends, of course. The scandal made *The Free Word* one of the most prominent newspapers in Paris while Clemenceau, tainted by the scandal, although no one ever proved any wrongdoing on his part, narrowly lost his seat in the Chamber of Deputies in 1893. Most people thought his political career was over, although those of you who have read ahead in the history of the twentieth century know that it is not.

Also in 1893, an anarchist set off a bomb inside the Chamber of Deputies. Fortunately it killed no one. The bomber claimed that the attack was in retaliation for the execution of another anarchist bomber. He would be sent to the guillotine as well, and die with the words "Long live anarchy!" on his lips. 1893 was the year that Pope Leo XIII published an encyclical to the French Catholic Church, which effectively said that the Republic is here to stay and suggested delicately that French Catholics needed to make their peace with it. The fact that many French Catholics reacted to this encyclical by getting angry at the Pope for selling them out tells you something about French Catholic attitudes toward the Republic. As for the Pope, he had his own troubles with the militantly secular Kingdom of Italy, which likely explains why he was in no mood to pick a fight with the government of France.

In the first week of the new year, 1894, France and Russia announced an alliance. This ended France's isolation, and dramatically changed the balance of power in Europe. This development deserves way more discussion time than I can give to it right now, so we'll have to come back to it later, but let me make a couple of key points. First of all, it got France out from under the uncomfortable position of being the smaller, weaker power, with a dominating Germany next door. This changes a lot. The Franco-Russian alliance could be seen as a counterweight to the Austro-German alliance. But how permanent the Franco-Russian alliance will prove to be is an open question in 1894. Now you and I know that it will last all the way until the Great War, 20 years from now, but that was hardly foreseeable at the time. France and Russia make quite an odd couple. You have a modern, progressive republic making common cause with the most retrograde autocracy in Europe. Even "La Marseillaise" had been banned in Russia until the treaty negotiations opened up with the French in 1892. So, while Germany and Austria are ideological soul mates, France and Russia are about as far away from each other as you can get. And you could regard it as a bad omen that the heads of state of both countries, France and Russia, would die within months of making the treaty.

Sadi Carnot, the President of France, was assassinated by an anarchist on June 24th. The assassin would say the killing was in revenge for the killing of the man who had bombed the Chamber of

Deputies. This man too would be sent to the guillotine. The Russian Emperor, Alexander III, unexpectedly fell ill from a kidney infection at about the same time, and would pass away on November 1<sup>st</sup>, at the age of 49. His successor, his son Nikolai II, was a distant cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm's. The Kaiser was even more closely related to the Empress Alexandra, they were first cousins, and the Kaiser would immediately set to work on the new young Emperor, spending years trying to persuade him to leave the French alliance. They would write to each other regularly, in English, for many years signing the letters Willy and Nicky.

We'll have to stop there for today, but I hope you'll join me next week on *the History of the Twentieth Century*, as we pick up the thread of France in 1894 with the Dreyfus affair, as France's political polarization threatens to tear the country apart. It was said of the Dreyfus affair that it was like another French Revolution, albeit one with less bloodshed. That's next week on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh and one more thing. After the death of President Carnot, Jean Cassimir-Perrier was elected President. He would last in that post for only 6 months before resigning, making his the shortest presidency in French history. His successor was Felix Faure, who I mentioned in episode 1, as dying under, embarrassing circumstances. Faure was a middle-of-the-road republican who offended no one, which is how he got the job. He was an able diplomat who built closer relations with Russia during his presidency, and also pardoned some famous French anarchists who were in exile in England, allowing them to return home. During Faure's presidency, France had the largest automobile industry in the world. But the industry had no friend in the Elysée Palace. Faure famously declared at the Paris Motor Show of 1898, "Your cars are extremely ugly, and smell awful".

[music: Closing Theme]